BITS AND BYTES

The Newsletter of the Midland Computer Club

GENERAL CLUB MEETING 7:00 P.M.
Meets 4th Wednesday of the month at the
Midland Community Center
2001 George St., Midland, MI

> **http://mcc.apcug.org/**

This month's date: June 24th

THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: Where to look for news on the Internet presented by Laura Hammel

PROGRAM COORDINATORS
Contact : Co-Chairpersons

Larry Piper   larryP56@chartermi.net

Joe Lykowski   joseph@lykowski.com

What you missed!
Bill Tower gave an informative presentation on how to use the Internet to help you find various investment alternatives that meet your investment goals at our May meeting. As is well known, a particular investment's history does not guarantee its future performance. But it a "proven horse" is usually a better bet than an unknown.

Upcoming Activities
In **June** Laura Hammel will be giving a presentation on "Where to look for news on the Internet — local, national and special interest." With many newspapers curtailing publication, people are increasingly turning to the Internet as the source of their information.

There will be no meeting in July.

August will feature our annual club picnic at the Community Center along with Joe Lykowski talking about how to upgrade your home wiring to address today's technology. Bring a dish to pass, hotdogs, soft drinks and tableware will be provided.

The President's Corner
An email that I received from Windows Secrets had this comment by Susan Bradley — "a new generation of malware has managed to surreptitiously place malicious JavaScript code on tens of thousands of popular Web sites." This code has been placed on various sites such as Tennis.com, Variety.com and ColdwellBanker.com, along with many others. With the infection of "big name sites," we need to continually be aware of where we are going and what we are doing on those sites. But as these infestations show, that is not sufficient. You should also be running a solid firewall and some sort of security software. You should make sure that Windows and your other applications (Adobe Reader, etc.) are being updated to patch any particular holes which may exist in them.

Susan Bradley recently received an MVP – Most Valuable Professional – award from Microsoft for her knowledge in the areas of Small Business Server and network security.

Another consideration is to use a limited user account when doing any browsing of the Internet. Most users are probably running as the Computer Administrator in Windows XP and Vista, however, by creating a second (but limited) account, you can prevent a lot of the infestations that try to sneak into your computer. Then when you are going to browse the Internet, you should log off as your Administrator account and log on as the limited account. Any software which then tries to install something without your knowing about it, will have to ask permission to go ahead. It's something to consider.

Let me know what you think and we can talk about this more at the next club meeting.
— Howard Lewis
(The above comments are the opinion of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Midland Com-

2009 MCC OFFICERS

POSITION   **EMAIL:**

President   Howard Lewis   lewis3ha@chartermi.net
Vice Pres.   Bill Tower   stressed@tir.com
Treasurer   Laura Hammel   Lhammel@gmail.com
Membership Gary Ensing   btiger6@yahoo.com
Editor   Jan Ensing   btiger6@juno.com
Webmaster Frank Koenig   frankspc@hotmail.com

http://mcc.apcug.org/

Special Interest Groups:

CLUB PROGRAM COORDINATORS

Co-Chairman   Larry Piper   larryP56@chartermi.net
Co-Chairman   Joe Lykowski   joseph@lylowski.com

BOARD MEMBER

Mary Branson   molly688@chartermi.net

INTERNET SIG

Terry Brown   t_bbrown@yahoo.com

PUBLICITY

Kathy Bohl   kbohl30265@aol.com

Board Meeting

The next board meeting will be 7 p.m., August 11th, 2009, @ Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church, 5501 Jefferson Ave., Midland.

Useful, useless and strange (in no particular order) Web Sites:

http://us.lastminute.com/
With the economy in the condition that it is currently in, 2009 is a great time to travel. If you don't mind making travel plans at the last minute, check out this site and see if you can find something that you would enjoy at a price you can afford.

http://www.recovery.gov/
The government makes this site available so you can see what the stimulus bill is doing for you.

http://www.good-tutorials.com/
Here we have some tutorials to help you work with your digital photos using Adobe Photoshop. The site has tutorials, not only on Photoshop, but also several other photo enhancement applications.

http://www.dpreview.com/
This site has reviews of various digital cameras. A good site to help you find a new camera that satisfies your photo needs!

http://www.refdesk.com/
Most of us have used the library Reference Desk at one time or another. The Internet also has a Reference Desk available for your use.

Membership Enrollment form

NAME _____   PHONE_____

ADDRESS _____ *CITY* _____

ZIP _____   *EMAIL ADDRESS* _____

Membership dues   FAMILY ($20)   STUDENT ($15)   NEW Member ____   renewal ____

Please fill out the above form and mail it along with payment of check or money order to :

MIDLAND COMPUTER CLUB   Attn: membership chairman
   P.O. box 132
   Midland, MI 48640-0132

you may also pay for membership at a regular club meeting

Tips, Tricks & Techniques
Add Quick Launch Toolbar

The **Quick Launch** toolbar is a great way to quickly launch any application with one simple click. By default, the **Quick Launch** toolbar is displayed when Windows is installed on a computer and is by default located next to the **Start** button. If the **Quick Launch** is not displayed, you can retrieve it by simply *right-clicking* in a blank space on the **Taskbar**, selecting *Toolbars*, and clicking on *Quick Launch*. This will place the **Quick Launch** toolbar on the **Taskbar** for simple access to any application or file folder.

Add A Program To Quick Launch Toolbar

Programs can easily be added to the **Quick Launch** toolbar for quick, one-click access. To add programs to the **Quick Launch** Toolbar:

Microsoft Windows Vista:
- Find the application in the **Start** Menu
•
- *Right-click* the application
•
- Click on *Add to Quick Launch*
•

Microsoft Windows XP:
- Find the application in the **Start** Menu
•
- *Right-click* the application and drag it to the **Quick Launch** toolbar
•

This will add the program to the **Quick Launch** toolbar.

Add Page Numbers To Your Documents – (Word 2007)

When creating a document in Microsoft Word 2007, you can add page numbers to each page. These page numbers can be on the top or bottom of the page and placed horizontally at the right or left margin or centered on the page. As the document grows, each page will automatically include a new page number. To add page numbers click on the *Insert* tab. Next in the **Header & Footer** section, click on *Page Number*. A list of various options will appear to allow you to select the position and style of page number.

A Quick Way To Create Mail

One of the most common tasks that we all do with our computers is process email. Rather than always open up your email client to send a new message, you can create a shortcut on the desktop that will automatically open the **Untitled Message** window so you can begin to compose your message.

To place a shortcut on your desktop:
Right-click on the *desktop,* select *New,* and click on *Shortcut*
In the **Create Shortcut** window, type *mailto:* in the **Type the location of the item field:** and click *Next*
Give the shortcut a *meaningful name* and click *Finish.*

Now you will have a new shortcut on your desktop. When you open up the shortcut, the **Untitled Message** window will open ready for you to start composing your message.

How to Keep Your Laptop Computing Cool and Your Wrists Pain-Free

Written by Gabe Goldberg, Computers and Publishing, Inc.
Tiplet (at) gabegold.com

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Laptop computers are increasingly popular, with sales rivaling or surpassing those of traditional tower systems. Several positive factors drive this trend: decreasing prices, more powerful models, and common availability of wireless network access (WiFi).

But more capable notebook systems often run hotter, causing two problems: discomfort when they rest on your lap, and heat-related early failures.

Fortunately, several versions of a simple and economical gadget <http://www.laptopdesk.net/desks.html> solve both problems, while also making it easier to operate the laptop: Laptop Desk from LapWorks.

Consisting of three parts -- two sturdy hinged pieces with no-slip rubber pads for gripping the laptop, and a small adjusting bar – the lightweight devices tilt the PC for much easier typing and allow air circulation underneath. Unfolded, the pieces lock into a 21" platform, easily balanced on one's lap; some models can attach optional mousepads to enlarge available workspace.

This portable workspace avoids struggling to balance a laptop or type at an awkward angle, and extends laptop life by reducing electronics heat.

In addition to keeping your laptop computer nicely air conditioned, the Laptop Desk positions its keyboard for easier and more comfortable typing, reducing strain on fingers and wrists. The Web site features advice from a Certified Associate Ergonomist and a comprehensive white paper about portable computer ergonomics. It also provides (hidden, oddly, on the About Us page) a quick diagram of best setup and posture for laptop use, a laptop care-and-feeding guide with usage tips, and a direct line to Wendy the ergonomist who answers questions and gives advice on laptop ergonomics.

Best of all, there's no argument about which operating system is better Laptop Desk is equally cool for Mac, Windows, Linux, or any other laptop PC operating system you might favor. It's available from the manufacturer and at retail electronics stores for about $30.

The Web site lists almost two dozen awards the product has received -- some big-nameworthy, others obscure. But I knew this product was a winner when, soon after it arrived, my very much non-geek wife appropriated it for her laptop and announced that where it goes, her Laptop Desk is sure to follow.

Note from Judy: LapWorks offers computer clubs a 20% discount on their products. Use Coupon Code APCUG20OFF.

Q: How can I keep from losing gadgets like remote controls?

A review by Gabe Goldberg, Computers and Publishing, Inc.
Tiplet (at) gabegold.com

Eyeglasses case, TV remote control, car keys, cat. Where is it? Things we have -- animate or inanimate -- sometimes take on a life of their own and do NOT cooperate by appearing when they're wanted.

We can't tie strings to them all, and blaming one's spouse for their disappearance is only briefly satisfying. So Loc8tor, a small gadget that finds what's missing, is handy to have around.

Loc8tor provides two kinds of small homing tag and two handheld locating devices which work like modern-day dowsing rods. The tags, attached to valuables, signal the devices from up to 600 feet away. The fancier device (pocket-sized Loc8tor Plus) has a small radar screen which displays lines pointing towards a missing tag; it can handle up to 24 tags. The lesser device (credit card-sized Loc8tor Lite, handles four tags) uses a row of lights and a beeping tone to signal when it's pointed towards the tag; more lights lit and faster beeps shows the device's excitement at pointing in the correct direction. Using either device, when you get close, the tag's blinking light and chirping brings you in for the finish.

The Mini-Homing Tag can be found by either Loc8tor; the Loc8tor Plus can sound an alert if a tag goes beyond a settable distance away – useful for keeping children or pets within a comfortable range. The Panic Homing Tag includes a button which sounds an alert on the Loc8tor Plus -- giving parent and child, or caregiver and patient, a simple and fast way to communicate an urgent message.

The tags are just a bit too large to mount on eyeglasses. That would require a rice-grain size item and the manufacturer simply can't – yet -- fit battery, antenna, radio, light, and beeper into something that small. And I've not yet convinced my wife that wearing a tag as an earring would be a pleasant fashion accessory, while letting me locate her in our house and yard.

But aside from those minor limitations, it's a great tool for avoiding tedious searches. True story: Such a device once found my keys in the pocket of a heavy winter coat I was wearing, saving me the trouble of wandering all over the house and THEN looking in my pockets. Depending on construction material, the signal works through walls and floors and can locate a car in a parking garage -- though likely only on the correct level. Testimonials describe use with pets, model airplanes, toys, and even for construction and running cables.

Loc8tor Plus Pack (locating device, three Mini-Homing Tags, one Panic Homing Tag) costs $170; Loc8tor Lite costs $80 (locating device, two Mini-Homing Tags).

How Can I Tweak Firefox and Thunderbird to Be As Great as People Say They Are?

Written by Gabe Goldberg, Computers and Publishing, Inc.
Tiplet (at) gabegold.com

One of the Internet's many beauties is the diversity of choices available -- for everything. There are multiple search engines, Web browsers, ISPs (Internet service providers), operating systems (Windows, Linux, Mac). This means that no two people have precisely the same computing setup or online experience and leads to hours of fun-filled arguments about whose choices are best.

In fact, competition works to everyone's advantage: no matter what your choice is for a given function, the vendor or manufacturer knows that you have alternatives and must hustle to keep your loyalty. The "browser wars" -- first when Microsoft pushed Internet Explorer (IE) development to catch innovator Netscape and more recently with Mozilla Firefox stealing market share back from IE (and, of course, with contributions from Opera, Chrome, and other contenders) -- have generated beneficial innovation and evolution.

Recent reports show Firefox taking market share from Internet Explorer -- but Microsoft is introducing Internet Explorer Version 8, so the horse race continues. So it's worth exploring (pun intended) why software like Firefox, which must be added to Windows systems which by default include IE, can be so successful.

In addition to speed and security superior to at least earlier IE versions, Firefox and its Mozilla sibling email client Thunderbird provide powerful customization tools. In Firefox, click Tools and then Options. Explore the tabs: Main, Tabs, Content, applications, Privacy, Security, and Advanced; within Advanced, subtabs address different functions. For each options group, the Help button displays specific
information describing choices available.

You needn't study and learn all options at once but it's worth occasionally browsing what you can tweak. Firefox defaults are certainly pleasant and workable but by making your own decisions, you can customize the browser to accommodate your unique preferences. On the Advanced/Update tab, I recommend checking all three boxes to check for updates, and then selecting "Ask me what to do" about updates. That way you'll find out about available updates and control when they're downloaded and installed.

But there's more! Click Tools, then Add-ons, then Get Add-ons, to open a wonderful catalogue of small tools you can add to perform new functions. These are available because Firefox is open source software, meaning it's developed, supported, and maintained by volunteers. While the most important browser functions are included in the basic browser, hundreds of developers produce add-on modules to extend it.

You'll initially see a few Recommended add-ons; click See All Recommended Add-ons to visit the Web site of all-things-add-ons. On the left, you'll see broad categories (e.g., Appearance, Bookmarks, Search Tools); the main display shows the most popular tools.

Explore categories in which you're most interested. But before installing any, browse for alternatives, since several add-ons may perform similar functions. Look at ratings (number of stars) and number of downloads reported -- obviously a highly-rated add-on being downloaded 150,000 times a week is a safer bet than a less-popular
lesser-rated choice. And read reviews for real-people descriptions of how add-ons work -- or don't. Note which Firefox versions an add-on supports, since some may need a relatively new version and others may not have yet been updated for them.

Thunderbird handles options and add-ons in a similar fashion. For perspective, I have 15 Firefox and 9 Thunderbird add-ons installed and occasionally shop for yet more to improve my browsing and email experience.

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How can I Read Office (Word, Excel, etc.) Files Without Buying Expensive Office?

Written by Gabe Goldberg, Computers and Publishing, Inc.
Tiplet (at) gabegold.com

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While Microsoft's Office applications suite dominates the Windows landscape, it's expensive and not universally used. And if you only need occasional access to Office-format files, you surely don't want to spend hundreds of dollars to buy software you'll rarely use, and even then only in limited fashion.

Fortunately, several free alternatives let you read these files!

First, if you only receive occasional Office-format files and just need to read or print them but not to change/update them, ask senders if they can convert the files to PDF (Portable Document Format). That's an industry-standard format, easily created by many free alternatives to Adobe Acrobat, and easily read by Adobe's <a href =
"http://get.adobe.com/reader/">free Acrobat Reader.

Second, if you only need to read and print Office files, Google the program name (e.g., Word, Excel, PowerPoint) with the word "viewer" to install the free Microsoft file viewer for the type of files you have. If the files were created by Office 2003 or earlier versions, you're done. If someone inflicts Office 2007 format files on you (file extension docx for Word, xlsx for Excel, pptx for PowerPoint, etc.) you'll also need Microsoft's free <a href =
"http://www.microsoft.com/downloads/details.aspx?familyid=941b3470-3ae9-4aee-8f43-
c6bb74cd1466&displaylang=en"> Office Compatibility Pack for Word, Excel, and PowerPoint 2007 File Formats.

Third, if you'll need to change Office files, consider Open Office, a free and reasonably compatible alternative to Microsoft's Office. It may not handle intricately formatted Word documents or convoluted Excel spreadsheets, but it's usually adequate for the sorts of documents, spreadsheets, and presentations mere mortals create and use.

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Q: How can I keep my PC clean and tidy?

Written by Gabe Goldberg, Computers and Publishing, Inc.
Tiplet (at) gabegold.com

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Like changing your car's oil or replacing your home's air conditioner filter, a little PC cleaning pays off with a faster, more reliable, and longer-lasting computer.

Although nothing suggested here is either rocket science or inherently dangerous, always follow the medical adage, "First, do no harm". So don't do anything that makes you uncomfortable (perhaps have a more experienced person clean up while you watch and learn), and back up your system and data. Then reboot, to get a clean start, and don't open any programs,

Before starting, to measure what your cleanup deletes, determine how full your hard drive is. Open My Computer, Right Click your hard drive (usually labeled "Local Disk (C:)"), and click Properties. Note how much space is used and free, then close the dialogue box.

Next, use Windows' built-in disk cleaning tool. Click Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Disk Cleanup, and the drive to clean, likely C. Choose what to clean; default selections are usually what you need. To be extra thorough, if your system has been running problem free, click the More Options tab and then Clean Up System
Restore. Confirm your choice and click OK.

Delete Web browser temporary files. Using Internet Explorer, click Tools on the Menu Bar, Internet Options, and Delete Files under the General tab. Other browsers provide similar functions, sometimes using "cache" to refer to the collection of temporary files.

Delete unneeded personal files, items outdated and no longer used. While most Microsoft Office programs (Word, Excel, etc.) store their files in the My Documents folder, you may have changed this default location. And other apps likely have their own favorite places to stash files. Look around, since cluttered files make Windows work harder to get things done and waste time and resources when they're backed up. If you collect photos, music and such, delete those you no longer want or need, perhaps saving them on CD/DVD or ISB drive. Sorting files by size or date helps
find deletion candidates.

If you run PC-based email software, it's worth periodically purging Sent and Trash folders, perhaps

pitching material older than a certain date. Then look for a Compact Folders option, some-times on the File pulldown menu, which squeezes out unused space from email folders.

Weed out software no longer used or useful by uninstalling applications with Window's Control Panel Add/Remove Software tool.

The Recycle Bin, which preserves erased files for recovery until it's emptied, has likely grown during this cleanup process. To empty it, Right Click its Windows desktop icon and click Empty Recycle Bin. Note that programs such as Norton Utilities may offer other cleanup options for the Recycle Bin and other Windows components.

Finally, remember that when writing to your hard drive, Windows places bits of each file in the next available open space on the hard drive.

While Windows can reassemble them, having many files fragmented slows access to them. So, to store all files as single entities, periodically defragment the hard drive. To do this, click Start, All Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Disk Defragmenter, select a drive, and click Defragment.

When finished, compare the amount of hard drive space used and free to what you saw initially. If this is the first cleanup you've done in a while, the amount of space recovered may surprise you.

Many books give much more detailed instructions for PC cleanups. Search Amazon.com for "degunking windows" and "cleaning windows" to see choices
(but don't be distracted by instructions for cleaning house, office, and car windows!).

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How to Work Faster with Keyboard Shortcuts

Written by Gabe Goldberg, Computers and Publishing, Inc.
Tiplet (at) gabegold.com

The Windows mouse is a mixed blessing. It does things -- like
highlighting and dragging text -- that would be tough to do with a
keyboard. And yet moving one's hand between mouse and keyboard is a
major distraction and time waster; even accomplished touch typers lose
keyboard focus when mousing.

So it's worth exploring how Windows' flexibility, providing multiple
ways to do things, lets keyboard shortcuts replace many common mouse

functions. First, remember that many tasks are standardized across Windows applications, so learning them once helps early and often. And while they'll become second nature as you practice them, don't be overwhelmed by their number -- notice a few that will be most helpful and consciously use them instead of mouse clicks. When they're automatic for your hands, pick a few more. You'll soon amaze colleagues and friends with your dexterity.

The most common shortcuts include

F1: Help
Ctrl+Esc: Open Start menu
Alt+Tab: Switch between open programs
Alt+F4: Quit program
Shift+Delete: Delete item permanently

Key combinations for editing include

Ctrl+C: Copy
Ctrl+X: Cut
Ctrl+V: Paste
Ctrl+Z: Undo
Ctrl+B: Bold
Ctrl+U: Underline
Ctrl+I: Italic

Microsoft provides many shortcut categories, including General folder/shortcut control, Windows Explorer tree control, Accessibility shortcuts, and Dialog box keyboard commands.

A similar page for Firefox lists an amazing assortment of shortcuts for everything but shining your shoes and waxing your car.

A simple way to learn frequently used shortcuts is to note their definitions on pull-downs from application menu bars.

To speed using favorite applications, press F1 for Help and look for "keyboard shortcuts" or the equivalent. Or Google the name of your app plus "keyboard shortcuts" (with quote marks). There's ample information; Googling "keyboard shortcuts" by itself finds almost four million hits!

Finally, a time-saving Web browser (Internet Explorer, Firefox, etc.) keystroke combo is Ctrl+Enter, which allows typing part of a domain name (e.g., "microsoft") and having the browser add "http://www." at the front and ".com", at the end. That is, entering "microsoft" in the

address bar and pressing Ctrl+Enter creates "http://www.microsoft.com".
Firefox adds Shift+Enter and Ctrl+Shift+Enter which similarly complete
.net and .org URLs.

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Q: How Can I Tell What I Can Do to Items on My Windows PC?

Written by Gabe Goldberg, Computers and Publishing, Inc.
Tiplet (at) gabegold.com

Windows exists to let you manipulate objects on your PC. (And, of course, to make Microsoft even larger -- though possibly not more disliked -- than the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy's Sirius Cybernetics Corporation.)

But if all you could to to things was left click, highlight, drag, drop, copy, and delete them, that wouldn't be interesting. So we use the right mouse button for object-specific actions.

Since Windows would be nothing without its jargon, the Right Click pop-up list is called a <i>context menu</i>, showing options and actions available in the "context" of whatever you click. The default – bolded (dark end emphasized) -- is what happens if you double click the item or simply select it and press Enter. File and program icons have default actions of open and launch, respectively.

Context menus can include actions shown on menu bar dropdown lists but also often include actions not otherwise available. Choices depend on the type of object clicked (such as desktop icon, hard drive letter, or file name) and its location. And they usually include standard actions such as Copy, Paste, Delete, Rename, and Properties.

Other actions are determined by -- surprise -- the context. For example, right-clicking within an e-mail being composed might also show Undo, Cut, Paste Without Formatting, Paste As Quotation, and Select All. And my Windows Explorer offers Open, Print, Edit, Send To, FAX Recipient, Open With, Scan With Norton AntiVirus, WinZip, Send To, Cut, Create Shortcut, Rename, and Properties. Context menus clearly offer a variety of actions; note that several of my choices designate software I've installed (Norton Anti-Virus and WinZip). And some actions such as Send To open submenus with detailed options.

Properties is among the most powerful context menu actions, displaying information, attributes, and settings for Windows objects. For hard drives and the like, it's also the gateway to actions and useful programs to run. A useful common keyboard shortcut is highlighting an object and pressing Alt-Enter to displays its properties.

Right-clicking the Windows Task Bar, on program names and unoccupied areas, produces short lists of powerful actions. And right-clicking items in the Notification Area (formerly called the System Tray, at the right side of the Task Bar) shows useful options. That's how I learned that right-clicking Windows' "updates available" icon reveals the updates' characteristics.

Right-clicking can also modify actions taken. For example, dragging an object while pressing the right button pops up a context menu when the button is released. Offering choices such as Move, Copy, Create Shortcut, etc., this allows easier control than remembering to Ctrl-click to specify Copy rather than Move.

Right-clicking can't break anything, since choices are displayed but no immediate action is taken; you can close the context menu by pressing the Esc key or left-clicking outside the menu. Remember that right-clicking can be faster than searching pull-down menus for the action you want. And exploring context menus often reveals powerful object-specific capabilities.

Left-handed friends can swap left and right mouse button functions for easier operation by opening the Control Panel, clicking the Mouse icon, and switching primary and "Right Click" button definitions.

As always, your comments and suggestions are appreciated.
Send any questions or comments to any board member at any time.
The Cl_b isn't complete without u!
E-mail addresses are listed on page 2.